

and seize our common opportunities together. It's hard to imagine how that future will work if China is not a part of it.

So to every one of you, from every part of America, those in Congress and those who lobbied the Congress, I hope for a long time to come you will remember this day and be proud of what you did to bring it about. And I hope and believe that our children and grandchildren will be the beneficiaries of your labors.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:52 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks,

the President referred to former Secretary of Commerce William M. Daley; and National Defense Commission First Vice Chairman Cho Myong-nok and President Kim Chong-il of North Korea. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert, Senator William V. Roth, Jr., Representative Bill Archer, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Representative Charles B. Rangel. H.R. 4444, approved October 10, was assigned Public Law No. 106-286.

Statement on Signing the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act

October 10, 2000

Today I am pleased to sign the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act, which significantly strengthens efforts to make America's beaches clean, safe, and healthy. America's coasts are not only a natural treasure—they are also the number one destination for vacationing families, making their health vital to our Nation's tourism industry. Yet each year, pollution forces thousands of beach closures or health advisories. The Beach Act will ensure that in the future fewer families arrive at the beach only to discover that it is too polluted for fishing or swimming. It requires States to adopt enforceable standards for water quality, regularly test coastal waters for health-threatening pollution, and notify the public of unsafe

conditions. In addition, it provides assistance to States to carry out these efforts.

This act builds on my administration's strong efforts to ensure healthier beaches and cleaner coastal waters, greater protection for endangered and threatened marine species, sound fisheries management, and support for marine protected areas. I urge Congress to fully fund ocean and coastal conservation programs for the coming fiscal year so that communities around the country may enjoy healthy beaches and clean waters for years to come.

NOTE: H.R. 999, approved October 10, was assigned Public Law No. 106-284.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Health Care Legislation

October 10, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)

I am writing to express my serious concerns that the Congressional Republican Leadership is preparing to pass unjustifiably large Medicare health maintenance organization (HMO) payment increases while preventing passage of a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. Managed care reform in the 106th Congress should focus on

patient protections, not on excessive payments to managed care plans. Moreover, these reimbursement increases are effectively diverting resources from critically important health care priorities.

This past weekend marked the 1-year anniversary of the overwhelmingly bipartisan passage of the Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights.

Despite the bipartisan majority supporting this bill in the Senate, parliamentary and political tactics have blocked an up-or-down vote on this long-overdue legislation.

At least as disconcerting is that Congress is proposing to dedicate \$25 to \$53 billion in increased payments to managed care—without a sound policy basis. The Congress is currently contemplating dedicating 40 to 55 percent of their total investment in provider payments and beneficiary services to increase managed care payments—over twice the amount they plan to spend on hospitals and over five times the amount that they plan to spend on beneficiaries. The Congress is proposing this investment despite studies showing that Medicare managed care plans are overpaid by nearly \$1,000 per enrollee and that their payment rates have grown faster under the Balanced Budget Act than the payment rates for traditional Medicare.

It is important to note that increased payments provide no guarantee that Medicare HMOs will stop dropping benefits or abandoning seniors' communities altogether. It is clear that increasing payments to managed care plans did not work this year—we invested an additional \$1.4 billion in Medicare+Choice, yet watched nearly 1 million seniors and people with disabilities lose access to plans. Without explicit accountability provisions, it will not work next year either.

The unwarranted managed care payment increases would deprive funding for initiatives that would have real effects on peoples' lives, such as: restoring State options to insure vulnerable legal immigrants; fully funding the Ricky Ray Relief Fund; providing health insurance to chil-

dren with disabilities; funding grants to integrate people with disabilities into the community; improving nursing home quality; eliminating Medicare preventive services cost sharing; targeting dollars to vulnerable hospitals; assuring adequate payments to teaching hospitals and home health agencies; and funding other critical health priorities. These high-priority initiatives are outlined in additional detail in the attached document.

These initiatives represent our highest health priorities. In contrast, Congress is increasing reimbursement to managed care plans at a time when Medicare managed care plans are about to receive billions of dollars in increased Medicare payments, which are linked to increases in fee-for-service payments to hospitals, nursing homes, and other providers.

It is long past time that we work together in a bipartisan fashion to respond to the Nation's highest health care priorities. It is irresponsible to provide excessively high reimbursement rates for HMOs without ensuring that they are accountable through the Patients' Bill of Rights and through commitments to provide stable and reliable services to Medicare beneficiaries. I urge you to produce more balanced legislation that puts Medicare beneficiaries and the Nation's taxpayers first.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Trent Lott, Senate majority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Robert E. Wise, Jr. *October 10, 2000*

Thank you. Well, let me say, I'm delighted to be here for a number of reasons. One is, I'm kind of tied down, you know, working and trying to get the Congress out of town, and I don't have much time to travel. And I meant to go see Versailles this month, so "Chez Rockefeller" is almost as good. [Laughter] And I always love coming back here.

Secondly, Jay and Sharon have been great friends to Hillary and me for many, many years. We served as Governors together. We sat together. We cogitated together. We voted together. We did a lot of good things together. And our States were remarkably similar in the years when we served as Governors. And maybe the similarity in part explains the fact that the people of West Virginia had been so very good